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ABSTRACT

The issue of educational access affects persons who live in urban areas more than any other single group in the country. The vast majority of such persons are black and economically and socially disadvantaged. A look at enrollment by geographic regions across the nation shows over 50% of all black students are concentrated in less than 2% of the public schools, and that blacks are underrepresented in postsecondary enrollments. These trends underscore the need to assure educational excellence within the areas of access, process, achievement, and transfer. To avoid the continuing trend of greater division between the educated majority and the uneducated minorities, there must be concerted efforts to build partnerships for the purpose of improving the access, opportunity, and success of high school students as they move to community and junior colleges and on to four-year colleges and universities. Specifically, effective articulation strategies related to curriculum, student support services (including student financial aid), and other policies and processes must be developed and implemented at all three levels of education. Considerable work has been done to promote the key factors of strong administrative leadership; greater emphasis on skills development; a climate of expectation of learning; and the use of assessment instruments, including projects by the National Alliance of Black School Educators, the College Board, and the Ford Foundation. (EJV)

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ACCESS AND EXCELLENCE: THE ARTICULATION CHALLENGE AMONG URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

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ACCESS AND EXCELLENCE:
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Nolen M. Ellison
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INTRODUCTION

In his recent description of equity and excellence as an educational imperative for changing the state of Black America, Charles D. Moody Sr. conceptualized an equity based education model as four dimensional. He described the four dimensions as:

1. Access - as it relates to schools, programs and classes;

2. Process - as it relates to the fair, humane and dignified treatment of students, parents, teachers and administrators;

3. Achievement - as it relates to test scores, grades, graduation and dropout rates, awards, rewards, and recognition;

4. Transfer - as it relates to additional opportunities for (or access to) post secondary education, vocational and job training, and improved life chances in the form of jobs that will provide equal pay, power, privilege and prestige.

The issue of access is one which, more than it affects any single group in the country, affects persons who live in urban areas. The vast majority of such persons are Black and economically, as well as socially, disadvantaged. What

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is the nature of the access which Black youngsters have to educational resources? Consider Moody's findings in a 1984 School Superintendent Study of Equity and Excellence. A look at black student enrollment by geographic regions across the nation showed that:

- 63% of all black students in the Northeast region of the country attended .77% of school districts in the region.

- 66% of all black students in the North Central region were represented in .78% of that region's school districts.

- 1.3% of all superintendents in 50 states enroll 67.3% of the black students enrolled in public schools

- of 15,538 school districts across the nation, the 50 largest districts account for almost 38% of all of the black students enrolled in public schools, with well over 50% enrolled in the 100 largest school districts.

These figure clearly describe the dilemna of access at the elementary and high school levels. Added to these facts, consider some findings from the 1984 Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education:

1. Minority groups are all younger than the white population with an average median age of 24.9 compared to 31.3 for whites. Therefore, the college age cohort for minority groups will increase at a time of decline for whites.

2. Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans continue to be underrepresented in enrollments in four-year institutions.

3. Blacks experienced proportional enrollment declines at all postsecondary levels, though they have registered slight increases in absolute numbers since 1976.

4. Blacks experienced losses in the proportional share of degrees earned at every level of education between 1976 and 1981.

5. Black men registered significant decreases in degrees received at all educational levels.

6. Hispanics and Blacks experienced increases in the number of high school graduates from 1975 to 1980, but the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in college for both groups declined.

7. Asian Americans registered gains in enrollments and degrees earned at all educational levels.

8. Minorities accounted for only eight percent of the total science and enginering doctorates employed in academia, and five percent of doctorates in the humanities -- a continuing and serious underrepresentation for all except Asian Americans.

These facts are stark. They point to the critical need to assure educational excellence within each of the four conceptual dimensions described by Moody. Most specifically, they point to the need to develop sound strategies which assure the first dimension - access to opportunities at all levels of education and training within the society. The issue, most directly stated, is one of increasing the number of students who successfully move from one level of education to another: from elementary to high schools, from high schools to community and junior colleges, and from these two institutions to baccalaureate and graduate degree granting institutions.

To avoid the continuing trend of greater division between the educated majority and uneducated minorities (a group that will increase dramatically in the next two decades), there must be concerted effort to build partnerships for the purpose of improving the access, opportunity and success of high school students as they move to community and junior colleges and on to four-year colleges and universities.

I refer specifically to the development and implementation of effective articulation strategies related to curriculum, student support services, (including financial aid planning), as well as other processes and policies which facilitate student access, opportunity and success at the three different levels of education.

The primary purpose of such linkages, coalitions and networks between high schools and two-year colleges (but particularly with community colleges) is to facilitate the cooperative in development of respective programs and curricula for high school graduation, Associate degrees and Baccalaureate degrees. The primary beneficiaries of such agreements are the students who are best served by current information about programs and protected by firm commitments among institutions of differing levels of education. Such students are thereby provided the opportunity of planning a total baccalaureate degree program at the outset of their planning for a college education.

As professional educators -- with direct responsibility for leadership, administration, counseling or student advising related to student development -- each of us must engage ourself in a personal as well as professional commitment to this effort. Even more important, as a National Council organized for the purpose of providing academic and personal support to students in order to improve their chances to use education as a means of entering the mainstream of society, it is imperative that our collective efforts be a vital leadership catalyst for building essential strategies, systems and processes.

What are the essential elements around which these vertical partnerships which assure student access, opportunity and success must be built? They can only be determined from a clear understanding of what key characteristics or correlates are crucial to building and maintaining a system of ongoing high quality education, hence student achievement at any level of education. These correlates include, among otners: Strong and effective administrative leadership in tne instructional and management domains; greater empnasis on development of reading, writing and mathematics skills; a climate of expectations that students can learn under appropriate conditions; and use of assessment instruments to provide continuous feedback on the effects of instruction.

THE WORK ON WHICH TO BUILD

Considerable work has been done which, directly or indirectly, addresses one or more of these key characteristics. Many of the efforts have been developed within the context of helping students move from one level of education to

another.

Some of this work has outlined, in detail, both the expectations and issues related to the education of black youngsters. Saving The African American Child, a report to the American people prepared by the National Alliance of Black School Educators in 1984, presents a vision of standards of quality education for black children -- standards of equity, academic excellence and cultural excellence. The report addresses twenty-one issues related to achieving the standards. The issues are related to testing, teaching methods, higher education, performance goals, new technology and research.

The College Entrance Examination Board's (CEEB) Educational Equality Project (Project EQ) is the result of that organization's ten year effort to strengthen the academic quality of secondary education and to ensure equality of opportunity for post-secondary education for all students. Project EQ has identified those academic competencies which college entrants need. It has also developed and launched a series of urban dialogues designed to increase the level of communication between high school and college faculty and adminsitrators on the basic academic competencies (mathematics, English and the arts).

Other works underway offer guidelines appropriate to developing models for articulation which are dictated by the needs, applicability, serviceability and appropriateness to an institution. The components included in guidelines to ACCT/AACJC's Minority Student Transfer Program relate to such aspects as institutional commitment, identification of potential transfer students, student assessment and placement into courses, counseling services related to transfer, articulation with high schools and universities, staff and curriculum development, special programs to aid academic preparation and motivation and evaluation procedures.

The Ford Foundation Urban Community College Transfer Opportunity Program (UCCTOP) represents yet another important work from which to build. UCCTOP is designed to assist urban two-year colleges in the development of models and programs which facilitate the successful transfer of minority students from two- to four-year colleges. One of its goals is to engage high schools as well as senior colleges in strengthening the transfer process. Among the

projects undertaken by the five urban community colleges which received 3-year grants in 1984 are curriculum revision to provide credits required for senior college acceptance, consultation with graduates now studying at four-year institutions to determine the best preparation for advanced study, skills improvements in reading, writing and mathematics, orientation programs and tutoring for eleventh and twelfth graders planning to go to college; and faculty mentorship programs to provide potential transfer students with academic and personal support. The Foundation's recently completed study report, Helping Minorities Achieve Degrees: The Urban Connection, prepared by Professors Richardson and Bender, seeks to identify and offer recommendations related to two-year and four-year college policies and practices as well as state level policies which affect minority student transfer.

The Minority Achievement Program, sponsored by the Association of American Colleges was launched to support the efforts of institutions which had devised special programs and services to enable minority students to be more successful in achieving their educational goals. The programs, in addition to identifying institutional commitment, program leadership, program conceptualization and faculty involvement as important to program success, also reaffirms the importance of early contact with students as well as teachers in their elementary and secondary surroundings.

Some of the work already completed provides an understanding of trends related to testing. The 1985 ACT/AACJC study on the Status of Testing Practices at two-year post-secondary institutions is of this nature. The results indicate the likely increase in use of skills testing for all entering students, mandatory testing for course placement in basic skills areas and the likely growth in advanced placement testing.

Still other work has focused on support of the concept of vertical articulation in terms of the long range financial planning and financial support needed by students. The United Negro College Fund (UNCF) has, in this regard, demonstrated a financial aid model by which it has committed to its member institutions its support of joint recruitment and matriculation efforts with surrounding community colleges. Through this model, UNCF would support students who are jointly matriculated at its member institutions and the "partner" community college at which the earning of the Associate degree is a

first step to completion of the Baccalaureate degree.

Finally, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) nas made a strong commitment to minority students in its 1985 Public Policy Agenda. Two of the eleven agenda items give priority attention to the themes of access and opportunity. In its role of national advocacy, leadersnip and service to its 1,200 member colleges, AACJC reaffirms and promotes the concept of access as fundamental to the mission of the community, technical and junior colleges. It has charged its National Council on Black American Affairs to serve as a resource for ensuring commitment to access to work with other Councils to develop access, assessment and developmental education, and to pursue legislation policies and funding to maintain and increase access to higher education. A special AACJC Urban Commission has, in addition to developing a position paper for the Association, also launched a nationwide study of student retention in two-year colleges.

EDUCATIONAL BRIDGES THROUGH EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The two most significant issues related to student access are the limited availability of financial aid and the often inadequate preparation which students receive in the public schools.

Urban community colleges face problems and possibilities unique in American higher education. Many of them are charged with serving the educational needs of communities with large numbers of minorities and disenfranchised populations, with deteriorating public schools and large numbers of dropouts and under-prepared graduates. To serve their constituencies, especially the educationally and economically disadvantaged which other institutions of higher education have historically neglected, they embrace challenges, goals, and a spectrum of programs and services other institutions eschew. Community and Junior colleges prepare large numbers of minority and other special groups of students with the skills required for technical and career fields. Just as importantly, community colleges are the needed bridges to baccalaureate and professional schools.

At the next level of the higher education ladder, urban four-year colleges and universities play an important role. Black colleges, for example, offer an

atmosphere of support that reduces the alienation of blacks in higher education. In many ways, historically black colleges are still perceived as the only answer to access and opportunity to professional study in science, technology and quantitative degree curricula for black students. Indeed, there is perhaps no better place where black students feel assured of a comprehensive educational experience that consists of equity and academic and cultural excellence. It would be a severe limitation, however, to view histrically black institutions as the only accessible avenues to higher education for black students.

The 1986 Ford Foundation Report on urban two- to four-year college transfer opportunities, prepared by Richard Richardson and Louis Bender, makes recommendations to improve both access and success for students as they seek to progress within the educational mainstream. Among their recommendations are the following:

Academic Enhancements:

- Develop discipline-based high school curriculum planning and student assessment which emerge from cooperative arrangements between two- and four-year colleges.

- Assure curriculum continuity (career ladders) between high school and two- and four-year college programs.

- Develop high school and two-year college exit competencies.

- Plan the two-year college curriculum with the faculties of high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges.

- Institute mandatory academic assessment and course placement at the community and junior college level.

- Develop appropriate student expectations for students in a sequenced manner from high school through the baccalaureate degree.

- Maximize the basic skills (particularly mathematics) preparation of

students at all levels of schooling.

Institutional Strategies

- Increase opportunities for two-year college faculty to work directly with high school students, perhaps through programs which introduce them to two-year college curricula and academic expectations.

- Increase the use of four-year college faculty as part-time community college faculty as a means of familiarizing them with community college student population.

- Develop in-service programs to train four-year college faculty to teach "non-traditional" students.

- Institute introductory progams (perhaps for 'credit-in-escrow') for community college students planning to transfer to four-year institutions.

As the United States confronts the uncertainties of a high technology future, the challenge of access to education and training become paramount. Minorities urgently need to increase their numbers on the national roster of scientists and professionals. Racial and ethnic groups as well as women, older Americans, and other minority groups must be able to access and benefit from the opportunities provided by higher education. These groups need to increase their numbers among all professional groups to participate more effectively in the economic and technological growth of their states.

A CALL TO ACTION

Significant opportunity exists for professionals in all areas of education to address the need for effective partnerships among high schools, two-year colleges and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Now, perhaps like no other time, a system for bridging levels of education must be created as a smoothly functioning network. The initiatives and strategies which exist contain many of the elements that will make such partnerships effective. The strategies will require careful identification of related issues, development

of clear goals and objectives, formulation of systematic linkages, and measurements of the impact of such efforts over an extended period of time.

To be most effective, however, it is imperative that such strategies are understood and supported by the commitment of key organizations which represent the educational spectrum -- the Association of Community and Junior Colleges and The American Council on Education, as well as local and national organizations which represent the special interests groups to whom access to education is most relevant.

While there is still room for improvement, there is certainly a great deal of success to be built upon. There is also a great deal of unfinished work. The recommendations below are designed to encourage AACJC, through its support to individual member institutions, as well as through the collective effort of all members of the organization, to embark on a comprehensive approach to developing relationships with appropriate local, in-state and out-of-state high schools, community colleges and other relevant organizations.

In this regard, Councils of AACJC are strongly urged to:

- Examine and develop appropriate articulation models with other organizations related to levels of education, taking full advantage of the knowledge gained, and the resources available from the extensive work that has been completed so far.

- Broaden and otherwise strengthen working relationships with funding agencies and national organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to student access, opportunity and success through strengthening bridges for student transition from high schools to community colleges to four-year colleges and universities.

- Continually stress the importance of vertical partnerships and cooperative relationships among high schools, community colleges and four-year colleges in such areas as curricula development, student services, classroom experiences, financial aid planning, and resource sharing.

- Provide a forum for sharing and dissemination of student development information and experiences, and evaluation of strategies related to developing high school to two-year college to four-year college (2 + 2 + 2) and two-year college to four-year college (2 + 2) articulation agreements and other relationships.

- Identify, and serve as a clearinghouse to secure financial support from private funding sources for the purpose of developing and implementing articulation agreements, particularly between two-year urban community colleges and four-year institutions.

The aggressive involvement of student development personnel from community colleges in activities designed to improve students' chances for four-year college success is imperative. The importance of early contact of four-year colleges with community college students cannot be overstated. Pre-baccalaureate instructors value exchanges with their college and university peers and gain a new appreciation of their role in students' lives. The same conditions are true for students, faculty, administrators and counselors who must prepare and assist high school students to gain access to community colleges.

Assuring that students have access to opportunities by preparing them effectively to move from one level of education to another, thus increasing their opportunities for academic, personal and professional success, will itself require a number of those ingredients which are needed to define excellence. The strategies related to building effective vertical partnerships must be pursued and implemented with a clear sense of purpose, a concern for students and an emphasis on educational quality. Only by so doing can the four-fold dimensions of equity-based education prepared by Moody be successfully realized.

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